

AYM Finance Committee Report to Yearly Meeting 2023

The twelve-month period on which we are reporting has truly been our 'annus horribilis'. In order to put it into context it is necessary to go back into some history of the last couple of years.

At Yearly Meeting 2021 Jane Drexler replaced Roger Sawkins as AYM Treasurer. There was a handover period of about twelve months.

At Standing Committee in September 2021, the Finance Committee was asked to prepare a report on the provisions in the Handbook relating to the Thanksgiving Fund in view of the substantial bequest the Fund had received in the previous year. Because of the handover to Jane, the draft of our report was not available until April 2022. At that stage the Thanksgiving Fund Committee made substantial comments on the draft and it also became clear there were differences of interpretation of the September 2021 Standing Committee minute which needed to be resolved. Jane's work and other delays meant that two joint meetings between the Committees to clarify the situation were not held until September 2022.

During the second of the joint meetings an incident occurred which caused Jane to subsequently resign as AYM Treasurer. Whilst she agreed to finalise the Audited Accounts for the year ended 30 September 2022, that left the Finance Committee to take over the Treasurer's responsibilities.

Our Committee spent a considerable amount of time trying to resolve the incident issue, having discussions with the Presiding Clerk and two Regional Meeting Safe Quaker Community Committee representatives, but our approaches were unsuccessful. Whilst the two SQCC representatives produced a report with some suggestions, the report did not address our major issue and clearly served another purpose of which we were unaware. However, we noted that the report did make recommendations in relation to the outstanding requests of Standing Committee. We hope those matters will be resolved urgently as they affect our ongoing consideration of AYM's finances.

Whilst all of this was going on, the Finance Committee was also dealing with a number of other issues.

- Firstly, we had discussions with AYM Nominations Committee to provide them with background to the AYM Treasurer's job and to help them in finding a replacement. At the date of this report we have had no indication that they are being successful in that quest. This is causing us, and will cause us in the immediate future, considerable extra work.
- Secondly, in the absence of a replacement AYM Treasurer we obtained approval from the Presiding Clerk, and subsequently from Standing Committee, that our Committee could act as 'Treasurer' in the interim period. This meant that all 'Treasurer' decisions had to be made as a Committee. We went from two or three Committee meetings a year to meeting weekly for up to two hours at a time.
- Thirdly, with Jane's sudden and unexpected resignation we were faced with a number of changes that needed to be made to bank signatories, investment holdings, government reporting requirements, etc. With no replacement AYM Treasurer in sight, temporary arrangements had to be made and the requirements of the banks and other authorities proved to be tedious and complicated.
- Fourthly, with uncertain control over our bank accounts and other financial arrangements, we had to take steps to ensure that AYM's cash flow was protected so that essential bills were paid. The Thanksgiving Fund Committee had approved two very large grants and we were unsure if finance was available to pay them. We therefore placed a restriction on payments of grants from AYM's various Concern Funds to ensure that there was sufficient money to pay the basic requirements. A Thanksgiving Fund grant of

\$100,000 was eventually paid in February 2023 and whilst we are able to pay a number of smaller ones in March we are still asking Concern Committees to refer to us before paying large grants.

- Fifthly, Standing Committee in September 2022 agreed to significant changes to the AYM Office arrangements and asked us to look into the question of funding them. We have had some discussions with the Transition Implementation Working Group (TIWG) but are still unclear what the costs will be as the Working Group has not yet finalised all the details of their changes. Given the information at hand, AYM is very likely to need a considerable sum from the bequest if Quakers Australia is to honour the initially proposed contractor fees into the future.
- Sixthly, during Jane's time as AYM Treasurer, decisions were taken to update our investment arrangements and transfer the Quaker Australia accounts to Xero software. Both of these changes have taken time, particularly with the complications from Jane's resignation. The latter is still being bedded down at the date of this report.
- Seventhly, we worked with Jane to conclude the 2021-22 audit and produced an Annual Report for the AYM AGM in January. We answered Treasurer questions both at the AGM and at the associated Standing Committee meeting.
- And finally, considerable Committee time has been taken in dealing with the many questions from Friends requiring information or advice from the 'AYM Treasurer'.

So where do Finance Committee and Treasurer matters stand at the date of this report?

1. Finance Committee has not received assistance in resolving the incident at the joint committee meeting. It appears Committee members have to accept this will not happen.
2. Whilst Nominations Committee is clearly working hard, a new AYM Treasurer has not yet been found.
3. Funding for the new AYM Office arrangements still needs to be determined. Finance Committee has not yet been updated since TIWG's 12 January email, which acknowledged there were still too many uncertainties to quantify the costs. Once these matters are clarified, and (4) below is concluded, our Committee can provide Standing Committee with meaningful funding options.
4. We understand the terms and conditions of the Thanksgiving Fund Handbook entries are to be reviewed by an independent review group, and we see this as urgent.
5. Finalisation of the new software arrangements is nearing completion. The new accountancy advisory/ bookkeeping service is working closely with Finance Committee members to fine-tune the regular bookkeeping support and reporting processes. We expect these to reduce the work of an eventual new AYM Treasurer.
6. Subject to (3), (4) and (5), Finance Committee will be better able to manage AYM's cash flow and can fund future grants from AYM's Concern Funds provided there is discussion with us about any large prospective grants.

We would like to thank Jane Drexler for the extensive work she did as AYM Treasurer, particularly at a time when she was facing severe health problems and grieving the death of her husband.

We would also like to thank Steve Smith for taking over as Convenor of our Committee and the work he did in that role. We are sad that neither is involved any longer.

We have no matters for consideration by Yearly Meeting.

At the date of this report the members of the Committee are Rob Walpole (TRM) Temporary Acting Convenor, Roger Sawkins (QRM), Carol Thornton (C&RM), and Ray Brindle (VRM).

NOTE: Friends can find these documents on the AYM Finance Committee's webpage (<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/Finance>). Scroll to the bottom of the page to find these documents, and click one of the links to view:

- Summarised version of the 2021/22 Accounts and Treasurer's Report to the AGM23
- 2021-22 Audited accounts